

Revised
27 December 1967

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Communist Reactions to Certain US Military Operations
in Vietnam

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. How would the Communists react to US operations in the northern portion of the DMZ or in immediately adjacent territory of North Vietnam? We think the primary factor influencing their reactions would be what they believed these actions portended for the future. Would they estimate that the US was merely seeking to neutralize Communist bases and sanctuaries in border areas? Or would they judge that the US was making the first moves toward an eventual massive invasion of North Vietnam and thus to a major change in the war? In attempting to decipher US intentions, the Communists would examine the circumstances, nature and scope of the US operations, as well as what the US said about them.

2. Based on these assessments, the Communists would determine their countermeasures. These would include not only immediate moves to cope with the new tactical situation, but also longer term preparations to deal with possible future US actions. Hanoi would have to consider not only new deployments of its own forces but whether the time had come to request substantial numbers of "volunteers" from other Communist countries. At what point would Chinese combat troops be likely to enter North Vietnam in some numbers?

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3. Generally speaking, we believe that of the three Communist partners, Hanoi would take the most somber view of the US action. The North Vietnamese leaders almost certainly believe that the US is already engaged in a track of escalation which, given their own unwillingness to negotiate, must have as its ultimate goal the overthrow of their regime. US operations in the northern DMZ, and particularly an invasion of North Vietnamese territory, would reinforce this belief. Moscow, on the other hand, is probably still willing to estimate that US objectives are more limited, and small-scale incursions into North Vietnam would probably not change this view. But the size, extent, and duration of the operations would clearly be of great significance in determining Communist assessments and Communist actions.

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